IN THE CLAIMS:

1-15 (Canceled)

16. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, wherein said means for retaining said wheels are constituted by annular slots, which are formed at the free ends of said tubular portions and form respective annular lips, and by collars, which are formed in said wheels and engage in said slots so that they are retained by said collars and retain said wheels on said tubular portions.

17. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, wherein said two annular ridges, which surround said tubular element form a channel between them, said annular protrusion, which is formed in said seat being engageable by forcing in said channel.

18. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, wherein annular ridges protrude from opposite sides of said supporting body and surround coaxially said tubular portions, and said wheels, on the side directed toward said body, are provided with annular grooves that are suitable to receive said ridges.

19. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, wherein said tubular portions form respective rolling tracks for rolling elements of bearings in order to rotatably support said wheels.

20. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, wherein said seat is formed by two semicylindrical portions that are vertically spaced with respect to each other so that the seat has an oval shape in a direction parallel to said vertical axis, said flat surfaces orientated in said direction parallel to said vertical axis.

21. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 20, wherein the elastic means, is interposed between said tubular element and said body and is sized so as to keep said body raised with respect to said tubular element in a position for braking the wheels, at which said ridges are in friction contact with the walls of said grooves when the caster is not loaded, and keep said body lowered with respect to said tubular element in a position in which the wheels are released and at which said ridges are free to slide in said grooves when the caster is loaded.

22. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 21, wherein said elastic means are constituted by a spring, which is accommodated in a seat of said body that is open toward said seat and lies above said tubular element and acts thereon.

23. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 22, wherein a hole is formed in said body, in a diametrically opposite position with respect to said seat of the spring, and is suitable to receive a screw that acts on said tubular element in order to lift it into the position for releasing said wheels.

24. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 19, wherein said supporting bearings are constituted by an annular cage, which is provided with a plurality of receptacles for said rolling elements formed by axial partitions, means being provided for retaining said rolling elements in said receptacles.

25. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 24, wherein said retention means are constituted by teeth, which protrude from said partitions into said receptacles.

26. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 24, wherein said retention means are constituted by a ring, which is associated with said cage by means of an annular

flange that protrudes from one of its faces and engages in slits formed in the ends of said partitions.

27. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, wherein said pivot can rotate in a bush that is inserted in said recess and is retained axially by an annular lip, which is formed on the rim of said recess and is folded onto said bush.

28. (Previously Presented) The caster of claim 29, comprising an element for covering said body that is shaped so as to mate with its contour, said element being locked on said body by an annular lip formed on the rim of said recess.

29. (Previously Presented) A self-orienting caster for pieces of furniture and the like, comprising: a supporting body; a pair of wheels, which are supported by said supporting body for rotation about a horizontal axis; a cylindrical recess provided in said supporting body and being open upward and having a vertical axis, said cylindrical recess being axially offset with respect to said horizontal axis; a pivot for the caster inserted rotatably in said cylindrical recess, said pivot being further insertable at a free end thereof in a receptacle of the piece of furniture in which the caster is to be fitted; a through seat formed in said supporting body; a tubular element that is driven through said seat coaxially to said horizontal axis, said tubular element having two cylindrical tubular portions that lie on opposite sides of said body in order to rotatably support said wheels; means for retaining said wheels on said tubular portion; means for axially and rotatably locking said tubular element in said seat that comprise two annular ridges of said tubular element provided so as to surround said tubular element, and an annular protrusion formed on said seat and suitable to engage said ridges upon forced insertion of said tubular element into said seat so as to axially horizontally retain said tubular element in said seat, and wherein said annular protrusion of

said seat has two flat surfaces, which are suitable to engage respective flat surfaces of said tubular element in order to prevent rotation of said tubular element in said seat and to guide vertical movement of said tubular element; and elastic means interposed between said tubular element and said body so as to act for raising said body with respect to said tubular element.

30. (New) A self-orienting caster for pieces of furniture and the like, comprising: a supporting body; a pair of wheels, which are supported by said supporting body for rotation about a horizontal axis; a cylindrical recess provided in said supporting body and being open upward and having a vertical axis, said cylindrical recess being axially offset with respect to said horizontal axis; a pivot for the caster inserted rotatably in said cylindrical recess, said pivot being further insertable at a free end thereof in a receptacle of the piece of furniture in which the caster is to be fitted; a through seat formed in said supporting body; a tubular element that is driven through said seat coaxially to said horizontal axis, said tubular element having two cylindrical tubular portions that lie on opposite sides of said body in order to rotatably support said wheels; means for retaining said wheels on said tubular portion; means for axially and rotatably locking said tubular element in said seat that comprise two annular ridges of said tubular element provided so as to surround said tubular element, and an annular protrusion formed on said seat and suitable to engage said ridges upon forced insertion of said tubular element into said seat so as to axially horizontally retain said tubular element in said seat, and wherein said annular protrusion of said seat has two flat surfaces, which are suitable to engage respective flat surfaces of said tubular element in order to prevent rotation of said tubular element in said seat and to guide vertical movement of said tubular element; and elastic means interposed between said tubular element and said body so as to act for raising said body with respect to said tubular element, wherein said two annular ridges,

which surround said tubular element form a channel between them, said annular protrusion, which is formed in said seat being engageable by forcing in said channel.

31. (New) A self-orienting caster for pieces of furniture and the like, comprising: a supporting body; a pair of wheels, which are supported by said supporting body for rotation about a horizontal axis; a cylindrical recess provided in said supporting body and being open upward and having a vertical axis, said cylindrical recess being axially offset with respect to said horizontal axis; a pivot for the caster inserted rotatably in said cylindrical recess, said pivot being further insertable at a free end thereof in a receptacle of the piece of furniture in which the caster is to be fitted; a through seat formed in said supporting body; a tubular element that is driven through said seat coaxially to said horizontal axis, said tubular element having two cylindrical tubular portions that lie on opposite sides of said body in order to rotatably support said wheels; means for retaining said wheels on said tubular portion; means for axially and rotatably locking said tubular element in said seat that comprise two annular ridges of said tubular element provided so as to surround said tubular element, and an annular protrusion formed on said seat and suitable to engage said ridges upon forced insertion of said tubular element into said seat so as to axially horizontally retain said tubular element in said seat, and wherein said annular protrusion of said seat has two flat surfaces, which are suitable to engage respective flat surfaces of said tubular element in order to prevent rotation of said tubular element in said seat and to guide vertical movement of said tubular element; and elastic means interposed between said tubular element and said body so as to act for raising said body with respect to said tubular element, wherein said seat is formed by two semicylindrical portions that are vertically spaced with respect to each other so that the seat

has an oval shape in a direction parallel to said vertical axis, said flat surfaces orientated in said direction parallel to said vertical axis.